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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

8 March 1979

National Intelligence Officers

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director for National
Foreign Assessment

National Intelligence Officer
for Warning

25X1 FROM:
Assistant National Intelligence
Officer for China

SUBJECT: Monthly Warning Assessment: China

Summary

The main issue facing community representatives at the meeting on 28 February 1979 was the fact that fighting was underway between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. We were no longer dealing with a hypothetical situation, and the details of the war itself dominated the discussion. We explored two general problems: first, would the war spread, and second, what would be its domestic consequences if the Chinese failed to achieve their goals. Our exploration of the first problem was somewhat inconclusive (this was primarily a problem, in the first instance, for our Soviet colleagues); we did reach consensus on the second problem--we expected leadership instability to develop if the fighting went badly, or appeared to go badly for the Chinese.

1. The Possibility of a Sino-Soviet Clash. All of us at the meeting thought the odds of a Soviet attack on China (or of deep involvement in Vietnam) were directly related to the course of the fighting itself. They rose dramatically if

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the Chinese penetrated deeply into Vietnam. We reached no consensus regarding where the likely flash-point would come, however, and our discussion tended to bog down in examination of the tactical situation on the ground in northern Vietnam. Most of us thought that the Chinese would limit their advance, stopping well short of a direct threat to Hanoi, but there were some dissents from this view. Several of us felt strongly that Soviet intervention, if it came, would occur in Vietnam, rather than on the Sino-Soviet border. Many of us thought that a Soviet attack on the border would have to be on a scale large enough to require prior mobilization, which we would observe. We all agreed that the Soviet reaction to date had been remarkably restrained.


2. Domestic Trouble in China. We treated this subject in somewhat less detail, agreeing that it would only become an operative problem if the Chinese were to suffer a military or diplomatic defeat or some combination of the two arising from the war. Nearly all of us thought that this situation would give rise to recriminations within the current leadership. Most of us thought that such infighting, if it occurred, was likely to be serious and would deeply embroil Deng Xiaoping, whom we generally believed was regarded in China as the architect of the campaign against Vietnam. Most of us thought that Deng's position might be undermined if the Chinese failed to achieve their minimum goals in Vietnam, but there are a few dissents from this view. Recognizing that this scenario for leadership instability was contingent on an impression of Chinese defeat, some of us thought it was unlikely to be acted out. Many of us thought that if Deng were undermined the "four modernizations" campaign (and probably the corollary opening to the West) would be in trouble, but several of us noted that these policies drew on wide support within China.



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